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*An exploration of the links between the characteristics of Australian tourist attractions and the amount of planning undertaken by attraction managers was conducted. Using a detailed mail survey (*N = *407, response rate = 26.7%), a categorization indicating four planning levels was devised: nonplanners, short-term planners, short- and long-term planners, and long-term planners. Attractions with greater levels of planning were shown to have higher levels of perceived performance and faced the future with better growth prospects and business confidence. They also reported higher management turnover. Attraction research, it was argued, needs to develop with studies from different regions and histories to test the value of specific findings. In addition, multimethod approaches are needed to disentangle causality issues linking planning and attraction characteristics.*

Keywords: *attractions; Australia; strategic planning; management*

A number of commentators agree that attractions provide the core elements for the development of the tourism product of a destination (Gunn 1994; Pearce 1998a). Gunn (1988) describes attractions as the "first power," "lodestones for pleasure," and the real energizer of tourism in a region. Pigram (1983) takes a more pragmatic approach by stating that without attractions, tourism as we know it would not exist. In addition, several authors have supported the notion that attractions are the primary reason for the existence of the *tourism system* (Mill and Morrison 1985; Gunn 1988; Leiper 1990). Attractions serve two key functions in the tourism system: they *stimulate* interest in travel to a destination, and they provide visitor *satisfaction* (Gunn 1994).

It is valuable to note that even these limited general observations about tourist attractions derive from the combined contributions of researchers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. Attractions, it can be emphasized, are a universally relevant tourism topic. They can be important in the maintenance of the image and success of long-standing tourism regions such as Florida or the development of new tourist nodes in such locations as the Middle East and Asia (Ritter 1987; Henderson 1999; Fodness 1990).

Despite this broad appeal, tourist attraction research is in its early stages. Lew (1994, p. 292) highlights that "tourism researchers and theorists have yet to fully come to terms with the nature of attractions as a phenomena," while Pearce (1998b) indicates that attractions deserve a multidisciplinary research effort.

The focus of tourist attraction research can be summarized by a number of broad themes:

- defining and classifying tourist attractions and understanding the components that comprise an attraction (Leiper 1990, 1997; Pearce 1991; Lew 1994);
- managing visitors (Pearce 1989; Moscardo and Woods 1998; Moscardo 1999);
- exploring visitor characteristics, perceptions, and reactions to components of attractions (Davies and Prentice 1995; Moutinho 1988; Boekstein, Bennet, and Uken 1990; Fodness 1990; McClung 1991; Jago and Shaw 1997); and
- describing the human resource aspects of attractions (Johnson and Thomas 1990; Law, Pearce, and Woods 1995; Deery, Jago, and Shaw 1997).

Academic tourism research has given very little attention to examining the organizational characteristics of tourist attractions. Exceptions include Braun and Soskin (1998), who provided a brief analysis of pricing strategies in Florida theme parks, and Dimmock (1999), who examined the management style and competitive strategies among tourism firms in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, Australia. In one of the few direct precursors to the current study, Henderson (1999), working in Singapore, found that there was an absence of planning, particularly crisis planning, in that country's attraction sector. She proposed that the absence of plans "might be partly explained by the fact that the attraction business is comparatively new to Singapore and has a short history; those involved have only had a limited amount of experience to draw on" (p. 180).

The focus of this study is to explore the links between the organizational characteristics of tourist attractions and the planning practices they adopt. While the geographical context for this study will be a broad sweep of Australian tourist

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attractions, it is anticipated that the relationships identified may provide a basis for testing hypotheses in other contexts.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

One of the core measures to be assessed in the present analysis is the attraction's strategic planning. Strategic planning is essentially a process of establishing the purpose and future direction of an organization (Soteriou and Roberts 1998). Numerous definitions of strategic planning are available in the management literature (cf. Chon and Olsen 1990; Waalewijn and Segaar 1993; Bryson 1998; Wheelen and Hunger 1995; Pearce and Robinson 1997; David 1997), but consensus on the exact meaning has not been achieved. Several common themes can be extrapolated from common definitions:

1. Strategic planning is a process consisting of a set of managerial decisions and actions.
2. It is concerned with matching organizational objectives and resources with environmental opportunities.
3. It deals with the long-term or future performance of the organization.

Models that describe strategic planning provide a number of opportunities for investigating the current and emerging directions of tourist attractions (Pearce 1998b). Unfortunately, strategic planning research in the attraction sector and in the tourism industry as a whole can at best be described as meager (Soteriou and Roberts 1998; Athiyaman 1995; Chon and Olsen 1990). While a few studies have investigated the need for planning at the macro or destination level (cf. Faulkner 1994), very little research has occurred at the micro or organizational level. Planning studies in tourism have also tended to focus on developing new products rather than managing existing products.

Gilbert and Kapur (1990) observed that strategic planning is rarely discussed in journals applied to the tourism industry. Furthermore, they stated that it is unclear whether tourism companies are managed strategically and whether a formalized process of developing, implementing, and evaluating strategy is commonly practiced. These sentiments are echoed by Athiyaman (1995), who stated that gaps exist in almost all areas of strategy research in the tourism industry.

Strategic planning can benefit tourist attractions by allowing operators to make better management decisions based on sound knowledge of future developments (Chon and Olsen 1990). While the success of a tourism organization may be linked to the development of strategic competitive advantages, research by Rovelstad and Blazer (1983) indicated that tourism businesses lagged behind manufacturing firms in strategic planning and research.

The general lack of strategic planning research in the tourism literature suggests that it would be wise to turn to the management literature for a more detailed overview of this area. Research dealing with small business planning is particularly relevant in this instance as anecdotal evidence would suggest that a vast majority of tourist attractions, at least in Australia, can be classified as small businesses, that is, organizations with less than 20 full-time employees (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997).

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SMALL FIRMS

Strategic planning research has traditionally focused on large corporations, and it is proposed that the models and constructs observed might not be relevant to smaller firms such as those commonly found in the Australian attraction sector. In fact, Jennings and Beaver (1997) state that the management process in small firms is unique and bears little or no resemblance to planning processes found in larger organizations.

Lurie and Polakoff (1987) suggest that strategic planning can potentially work quite well in smaller, growth-oriented organizations. However, Robinson and Pearce (1984) described planning in small firms as unstructured, irregular, and piecemeal or compartmentalized. The planning process in firms has also been characterized as incremental, sporadic, and reactive, and objectives have been described as "vague or inadequately defined, and generally pragmatic and short-range" (Sexton and Van Auken 1985, p. 7).

Small firms are concerned with manipulating a limited amount of resources to gain the maximum immediate and short-term advantage. In small firms, efforts are not concentrated on predicting future opportunities and threats but on adapting as quickly as possible to current threats and changes in the environment (Jennings and Beaver 1997).

In summary, tourism research has given very little attention to strategic planning, while the planning literature has tended to focus on larger nonservice organizations. There is clearly an opportunity to contribute to the literature in both areas by investigating the planning activities of tourist attractions, particularly those that fall into the smaller business sector.

THE STUDY

The study of tourism is often said to be multidisciplinary in nature due to the many industries and sectors that are involved in catering for the needs of travelers (Gunn 1994). The present research adopts a multidisciplinary approach by applying studies in the management and strategic planning fields to a tourism research setting.

The study provides an assessment of planning practices in Australian tourist attractions. The purpose of the study is as follows: to investigate the relationship between attraction characteristics and the extent of planning activities.

There is an inherent complexity in the causality of the variables under consideration in this study. One can adopt the view that the level of planning is a consequence of the organization's characteristics. In this perspective, following Henderson (1999), it might be predicted that smaller, newer attractions would be marked by lower levels of planning. Such causal unidirectionality may in fact be misplaced. Attractions may be small in terms of numbers of visitors or staff because, since their inception, they have had a planning regime that has deliberately suppressed growth (cf. Chon and Olsen 1990; Sexton and Van Auken 1985). The present study only provides a "snapshot" of the links between planning and attraction characteristics and may not be the best basis for inferring how the links have occurred or operate (Pizam 1994, p. 98). Nevertheless, while studies with an experimental

or longitudinal approach might serve to understand more adequately the directionality of effects, some attempt will be made to forge the multiple relationships observed in the wide ambit of the study into a plausible pattern of tourist attraction development.

METHOD

The research focused on Australian tourist attractions in operation between April and July 2000. No limitations were imposed on the size of attractions. The sample was selected on a nonrandom, convenience basis. Databases of tourist attraction contact details for each Australian state and territory were obtained from both government and private promotional sources. The complete database resulted in more than 2,000 attractions. The operational definition of attractions for this study was effectively those businesses and locations designated as tourist attractions by dominant tourist information sources and state government tourist bodies.

The types of organizations qualifying as attractions were controlled further for this study. The complete database was subjected to a filtering process to eliminate attractions that were inappropriate for the study. This filtering process was necessary because individual sources varied in detail and classification of attractions. The types of attractions that were removed from the database included the following:

- *Nonmanaged attractions and landscape features* (such as lookouts, parks, gardens, lighthouses, and picnic grounds)—It was highly unlikely that responses would be received from these attractions since there is usually no single individual with a direct management responsibility.
- *National parks*—National parks are managed by a central administration in each state, and it was felt that their organizational structure and responses would be worthy of separate analysis. The very large number of parks in Australia would also provide an undesirable masking effect on the statistical details of attraction organizations.
- *Craft shops, souvenir stores, tearooms, and retail outlets* (including retail galleries)—These operations were, by definition, not considered to be attractions but are well-promoted retail outlets that supplement tourist destinations and attractions.
- *Markets and festivals*—The temporary and sporadic nature of markets and festivals excluded these attractions from the study.
- *Wineries*—After careful deliberation, wineries were excluded from the sample as they were viewed as not being representative of most attractions. In the Australian context, wineries offer facilities to visitors as a supplementary activity rather than as a core business. It was felt that the large number of wineries in the original database would have introduced highly irregular results.

Some of the themes or types of attractions included in the database were museums, Australian culture and history attractions, theme parks, gardens, galleries, wildlife parks and aquaria, National Trust sites, farming-themed attractions, and nature-based and adventure/action sites.

A self-administered mail questionnaire was used to collect information about individual attractions. The questionnaire was addressed to the general manager of the attraction. A return address was added to the back of each envelope so that undelivered questionnaires could be eliminated from the study. Prepaid postage envelopes were also included with all questionnaires to facilitate ease of return.

An adaptation of Dillman's (1978) total design method was used in an attempt to maximize the response rate. This technique involves the use of follow-up postcards to remind managers to complete the questionnaire. One follow-up mailing of postcards was initiated to act as a reminder and to encourage further response.

A total of 1,665 questionnaires were sent by standard mail in April 2000. At the conclusion of the study in July 2000, 430 responses had been received. Of these, 23 were deemed to be invalid, leaving 407 accurately completed returns. Questionnaires were deemed to be invalid if they were returned by establishments that were excluded from the study. A further 55 (3.3%) questionnaires were returned undelivered, indicating that 1,610 questionnaires reached their destination. This was a good indication that the database was largely accurate. The response rate for the questionnaires that were delivered was 26.7%. This was within the expected response range of 20% to 30% (Veal 2000).

ASSESSING PLANNING LEVELS

The key questions on planning that formed the basis for this research were as follows. A core measure was constructed to meet the goals of the research. Four mutually exclusive planning types or levels were assessed based on the managers' responses to their participation in short-term and long-term planning. Managers were asked whether a short-term plan of 1 year or less was prepared for the attraction, and whether a long-term plan of more than 1 year was prepared for the attraction. The four levels and the numbers of responses appropriate to each level are presented in Figure 1. Each successive level implies a greater level of complexity and formality in planning efforts, so level 1 signifies the lowest complexity, and level 4 signifies the highest.

The attraction characteristics that were examined are grouped into seven main categories: attraction type, attraction size, attraction admission, market characteristics, the years of operation, perceived performance, and environmental complexity.

RESULTS

Attraction Type

An investigation of planning levels based on attraction type provides a number of interesting contrasts. A large number of attractions (49.6%) responding to the questionnaire were museums (see Table 1). The categories presented are not mutually exclusive. Attraction managers were able to select any number of categories that best described their attraction. To place this data in context, it should be noted that 50.4% of attraction managers selected more than one category. For example, some museums may have selected both the museum and Australian culture and history

FIGURE 1
FOUR LEVELS OF PLANNING IN TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

	No Short-Term Planning	Short-Term Planning
No Long-Term Planning	Nonplanners (level 1) *n* = 98	Short-term planners (level 2) *n* = 88
Long-Term Planning	Long-term planners (level 3) *n* = 46	Short- and long-term planners (level 4) *n* = 175

categories. The multiple-answers approach adopted to reporting results recognizes that many attractions are diversifying to provide tourists with a compelling mix of entertainment and education and thus cannot be restricted to a single category. Nevertheless, the substantive meaning of the themes remains a useful organizer of the information.

The results indicate that military attractions and museums are the most likely to engage in no planning. In contrast, gardens, action adventure attractions, and nature-based attractions show a strong propensity toward higher levels of planning. There are also notable constraints within some categories, such as theme parks, where the planning seems to be either limited or extensive. A consideration of further variables may assist in an understanding of this pattern of results.

Attraction Size

Lindsay and Rue (1980) found that the size of an organization plays a key role in the strategic planning process. Indeed, the preceding discussion of planning in small organizations implies that planning is less evident in smaller firms. Key measures of attraction size—such as visitor numbers, number of paid employees, gross revenue, total profit, and asset value—were compared between the four levels of planning using a Kruskal-Wallis independent samples test. Statistically significant results for attraction size are presented in Table 2, and means are provided as a basis for comparison.

The results indicate that there was a significant difference in the mean number of visitors for the four planning levels. The mean number of visitors increases with each successive increase in the level of planning. It is clear that attractions at level 4 outperform nonplanners (level 1) in terms of visitor numbers.

The number of paid employees was included as a measure of size as it is a reflection of long-term performance and an attraction's ability to survive. The number of volunteers was deliberately excluded from this measure because volunteer positions require no remuneration and do not accurately reflect the number of employees an attraction is able to support financially. The number of paid employees supported by an attraction was compared between the four levels of planning. Table 2 indicates that the mean number of paid employees was significantly higher for attractions at planning level 4 than for those at planning level 1. In fact, the largest difference occurs between planning level 1 and level 2, which represents the difference between nonplanners and short-term planners.

An assessment of gross revenue, total profit, and the asset value of attractions provides additional information about the performance of the sector. It should be noted that due to the sensitive nature of these data, a number of attractions declined to provide information about their finances. The financial measures of size were compared between the four levels of planning. The results indicate that there were significant differences between attractions in the four planning levels for all three financial measures.

Planners receive significantly more gross revenue than nonplanners (level 1). Once again, the largest increase in mean gross revenue occurs between level 1 and level 2. It was expected that the results for total profit would mirror those of gross revenue since total profit is ultimately the result of revenue minus expenses. The key difference is that profit indicates the ability of operators to manage liabilities and expenses. The results indicate that there was a significant difference in total profit between the four planning levels. The average total profit increased with each level of planning up to level 3. It was somewhat unexpected that the mean for level 4 was lower than value of level 3. The median values for the four levels were investigated in an attempt to counter the effects of skewness, but the same trend was found. There are two explanations for the drop in mean profit between level 3 and level 4. First, the size differences between the four groups may account for the unexpected findings. Level 3 includes only 17 attractions, while the mean for level 4 is based on 74 attractions. Second, a combination of short- and long-term planning may introduce costs that result in a lower total profit figure. An example of this may be costs associated with developing a new attraction element. The results for asset value indicate that there is a significant difference between the four planning levels. The results indicate that the level of planning increases with the asset value of an attraction. The results show that planners perform better, in financial terms, than nonplanners.

Visitor growth was measured by a 3-point scale ranging from 1 = *decline in visitor numbers* to 3 = *increase in visitor numbers*. The results in Table 2 indicate that there are significant differences in the mean growth of attractions at the various planning levels. Mean visitor growth increased gradually as the level of planning increased. The largest difference appears to occur between managers who do not plan (level 1) and managers who engage in short-term planning only (level 2).

It can be concluded that planners (levels 2 to 4) outperform nonplanners (level 1) in terms of visitor numbers, visitor growth, number of paid employees, asset value, gross revenue, and total profit. These findings are consistent with the general perception in the management literature that larger organizations are more inclined to engage in planning than smaller organizations (Dean, Brown, and Bamford 1998; Chen and Hambrick 1996). It is unclear whether planning creates larger attractions or whether an increase in attraction size and complexity triggers the need for planning. While an association between planning and size is evident, the research does not confirm a causal relationship between

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF ATTRACTION TYPE BY PLANNING LEVEL

Attraction Category	*n*	Mean	Planning Level (%) Level 1: Nonplanners	Level 2: Short Term	Level 3: Long Term	Level 4: Short and Long Term
Military	17	2.47	41.2	11.8	5.9	41.2
Museums	186	2.49	33.9	20.4	8.1	37.6
Australian culture	140	2.64	28.6	21.4	7.1	42.9
National Trust	28	2.79	21.4	28.6	0.0	50.0
Farming	47	2.87	17.0	29.8	2.1	51.1
Theme parks	31	2.90	25.8	12.9	6.5	54.8
Galleries	48	3.08	8.3	27.1	12.5	52.1
Manufacturing	20	3.10	15.0	15.0	15.0	55.0
Wildlife parks and aquaria	40	3.15	7.5	20.0	22.5	50.0
Action/adventure	24	3.29	0.0	33.3	4.2	62.5
Nature based	45	3.31	8.9	15.6	11.1	64.4
Gardens	37	3.38	5.4	13.5	18.9	62.2
All attractions	407	2.73	24.1	21.6	11.3	43.0

TABLE 2

KRUSKAL-WALLIS TEST COMPARING LEVELS OF PLANNING FOR ATTRACTION CHARACTERISTICS

	Planning Level									
	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4			
Characteristics	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	χ^2	*p*
Attraction size										
Visitor numbers	12,990	70	23,687	67	42,148	33	57,429	142	51.878	0.000
Paid employees	3	97	6	82	7	43	9	158	34.122	0.000
Gross revenue (AU$)	69,928	57	321,857	41	441,629	26	553,380	89	40.698	0.000
Total profit (AU$)	11,847	41	17,098	38	81,587	17	53,914	74	11.351	0.010
Asset value (AU$)	499,341	23	1,476,724	35	2,743,336	21	2,620,521	71	9.971	0.019
Visitor growth[a]	2.23	94	2.43	82	2.59	44	2.61	173	26.267	0.000
Attraction admission (AU$)										
Adult	3.75	71	5.47	60	6.21	31	7.53	123	32.749	0.000
Child	1.92	58	3.10	54	3.59	30	4.47	114	32.524	0.000
Concession	3.78	31	4.36	40	5.14	21	5.84	97	8.936	0.030
Family	11.94	31	18.95	33	20.24	17	20.43	85	13.372	0.006
Market characteristics										
Length of stay (min)	69	92	82	83	95	44	97	168	13.017	0.005
Days open	5.6	92	5.9	83	6.1	44	6.3	138	9.653	0.022
Management tenure (years)	11.5	92	13.1	83	14.6	44	9.6	168	9.911	0.019

a. Mean is based on the following scale: 1 = *visitors decreasing*, 2 = *visitors staying the same*, 3 = *visitors increasing*.

these measures. As suggested earlier, the causal relationship between these elements requires greater attention and represents tourism research opportunities using different methods and forms of data.

Attraction Admission

The role of admission prices as a core source of revenue warrants further attention. Planning has the potential to help managers identify the optimum prices for admission. With this in mind, the admission charges for attractions at the four levels of planning were examined using the Kruskal-Wallis statistic. Means were calculated to assist comparison.

Table 2 indicates that admission prices increased according to the level of planning. Attractions engaging in planning activities had significantly higher admission rates for the adult, child, concession, and family categories when compared to nonplanners.

It was unclear whether planning results in higher admission fees or whether an underlying factor such as attraction size can be attributed to these results. The correlation matrix in Table 3 shows reasonable to strong correlations between admission prices and visitor numbers, gross revenue, and number of paid employees. The matrix indicates only weak correlations between admission prices and the other two measures of attraction size (profit and asset value). This

TABLE 3

SPEARMAN CORRELATION OF TOURIST ATTRACTION CHARACTERISTICS

	Attraction Size					Market Characteristics		Attraction Age		Admission		
	Visitor Numbers	Asset Value	Total Profit	Gross Revenue	Paid Employees	Open Days	Length of Stay	Age	Management Tenure	Adult	Child	Concession
Visitor numbers	—											
Asset value	.596*	—										
Total profit	.337*	.192*	—									
Gross revenue	.826*	.515*	.472*	—								
Paid employees	.706*	.413*	.308*	.822*	—							
Open days	.464*	.252*	.273*	.459*	.384*	—						
Length of stay	.225*	.453*	.058	.333*	.170*	.130*	—					
Attraction age	–.119*	.122	–.025	–.126*	–.214*	–.068	.121*	—				
Management tenure	–.126*	.078	–.114	–.121	–.181*	–.035	.106	.452*	—			
Adult admission	.666*	.390*	.303*	.686*	.547*	.420*	.453*	–.187*	–.120	—		
Child admission	.664*	.477*	.303*	.746*	.620*	.382*	.489*	–.233*	–.161*	.917*	—	
Concession admission	.551*	.347*	.268*	.608*	.493*	.318*	.465*	–.152*	–.070	.967*	.893*	—
Family admission	.643*	.429*	.206	.712*	.502*	.340*	.386*	–.090	.032	.956*	.895*	.918*

*Significant at the .05 level (two-tailed).

suggests that attraction size may be an underlying factor in explaining why admission prices increase with the level of planning. Consequently, it can be stated that there is an association between the level of planning and attraction admission prices. Further detailed research is required to substantiate a causal relationship between these factors.

Market Characteristics

Market characteristics such as length of stay and market access were analyzed to determine differences between the four levels of planning.

It can be argued that the presence or absence of planning activities may influence length of stay. Planning may result in operational or infrastructure changes that may encourage visitors to spend more time at an attraction. This is desirable in some instances because a longer length of stay may mean that visitors spend more on food or beverages. In addition, a longer length of stay means that visitors have less time to visit competing attractions.

The results of a Kruskal-Wallis analysis (see Table 2) indicates that the length of stay is significantly longer (p = .005) in attractions that engage in planning activities. The most notable increases occur between level 1 and level 2 (an increase of 13 minutes) and level 2 and level 3 (another increase of 13 minutes). There is not a great difference in average length of stay between long-term planners (level 3) and attractions that use a combination of short- and long-term planning (level 4).

Market access was examined from a temporal perspective rather than a geographic perspective. The number of open days per week is an important measure of the level of dedication and resources available to attraction managers. The mean number of open days per week was compared for the four levels of planning using the Kruskal-Wallis statistic.

The analysis found that there is a significant difference (p = .022) between the four levels of planning. Each successive level of planning resulted in an increase in the mean by at least 0.2 days. Level 4 planners were open for an average of 6.3 days per week, while nonplanners were open for an average of 5.6 days.

Attraction Age and Management Tenure

It was anticipated that planning might affect the long-term survival of tourist attractions, with older attractions being more likely to engage in planning. Surprisingly, it was found that the average age for attractions engaging in short-term planning (17.3 years) was *lower* than the age for nonplanners (19.1 years). In contrast, the average age for attractions engaging in long-term planning (28.7 years) or a combination of short- and long-term planning (21.0 years) was *higher* than the age for nonplanners. A Kruskal-Wallis independent samples test indicated that none of these differences was significant (p = .149).

The tenure of current management was also examined to identify any differences between long-term planners, short-term planners, and nonplanners. The Kruskal-Wallis test results in Table 2 indicate that there are significant differences (p = .019) in the average length of tenure between the four planning levels.

The most surprising finding is that the average length of tenure for managers engaging in level 4 planning (both short- and long-term planning) was lower than all other levels of planning. Perhaps the combination of short- and long-term planning creates a performance-driven culture within the organization, resulting in higher management turnover. In addition, authors such as Lurie and Polakoff (1987) have recognized that the long-term goals of smaller businesses may be secondary to the personal goals of an owner/manager. Thus, planning in smaller attractions may be informal in the sense that it is driven by the personal goals of owner/managers, rather than by business performance. In such situations, owner/managers may exhibit long tenure but may perceive no need for formal planning.

TABLE 4

ROTATED FACTOR CORRELATION MATRIX FOR PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE SCALES

Perceived Performance Measure	Mean[a]	Correlation of Performance Factors: Size	Growth	Social Responsibility
Total revenue	2.78	*0.850*	0.121	0.095
Net profit	2.92	*0.848*	0.028	0.046
Market share (number of visitors)	2.71	*0.671*	0.215	0.193
Total asset base	2.27	*0.550*	0.245	–0.028
Diversification	2.33	0.164	*0.860*	0.040
Development of new elements	2.36	0.058	*0.799*	0.261
Growth in visitor numbers	2.65	0.387	*0.568*	0.095
Relationship with the local community	1.72	–0.003	–0.001	*0.863*
Employee satisfaction	1.93	0.127	0.278	*0.739*
Quality of attraction	1.65	0.337	0.410	*0.428*
Aggregate factor mean[a]		2.67	2.45	1.78

Note: Italics indicate a strong correlation with the factors identified.
a. Mean is based on the following scale: 1 = *very good* to 5 = *very poor*.

Attraction Performance

The strategic management literature is dominated by research that has sought to investigate the relationship between various management and organizational variables and the success of strategic planning as measured by performance indicators. According to Schwenk and Shrader (1993, p. 61) the question is no longer "Does strategic planning affect small firm performance?" Rather, it is "Under what conditions is performance enhanced by small-firm strategic planning?"

Despite the volume of studies in this area, researchers have failed to reach full consensus on whether strategic planning results in increased performance. Several studies have reported a positive relationship between strategic planning and performance (Armstrong 1982; Jones 1982; Sexton and Van Auken 1985; Bracker, Keats, and Pearson 1988; Robinson and Pearce 1988; Pekar and Abraham 1995). These authors typically argue that formal strategic planning provides structure for decision making, facilitates a long-term planning culture, and generally benefits small firms. In contrast, a number of studies have also concluded that there is

TABLE 5

FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE RATING SCALES

	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.663	36.627	36.627	3.505	25.046	25.046
2	1.473	14.727	51.354	2.067	20.669	45.715
3	1.040	10.396	61.750	1.604	16.035	61.750

TABLE 6

ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS FOR PERFORMANCE FACTORS AND PLANNING LEVEL

	Planning Level									
	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4			
Performance Factor	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	*F*	*p*
Size	2.82	62	2.63	68	2.49	30	2.63	143	1.179	0.318
Growth	2.79	67	2.55	69	2.34	32	2.27	149	7.698	0.000
Social Responsibility	1.83	64	1.84	65	1.72	32	1.74	150	0.772	0.511

Note: Mean is based on the following scale: 1 = *very good* to 5 = *very poor.*

little or no relationship between formal strategic planning and the performance of organizations (Robinson and Pearce 1983; Robinson et al. 1984; Orpen 1985; Robinson, Logan, and Salem 1986; Cragg and King 1988; Shrader, Mulford, and Blackburn 1989).

Perceived performance is a key measure in identifying how attraction managers view themselves in relation to their competitors. Previous studies by Venkatraman and Ramanujam (1986), Robinson and Pearce (1988), and Hart and Banbury (1994) have indicated that subjective measures of performance obtained from managers correlate strongly with objective measures.

Attraction managers were asked to compare the performance of their attraction with their competitors using a set of ten 5-point rating scales ranging from 1 = *very good* to 5 = *very poor*. The items, presented in Table 4, were tested for their reliability by using Cronbach's alpha model to test for similarity. An alpha of .80 was obtained, indicating a high similarity in the content being measured.

The results provide an interesting summary of how attraction managers view the performance of their attractions. When evaluating the performance of their own attractions, quality was rated most positively by managers. Managers also rated their relationship with the local community highly. This indicates that many attractions have an ability to integrate themselves with the local community.

Interestingly, many attractions did not rate themselves highly in terms of the tangible measures of comparison such as market share (visitor numbers), total revenue, visitor growth, and net profits. In terms of market share, total revenue, and net profits, most operators rated their performance as average.

To simplify the data and identify underlying patterns, we subjected the 10 rating scales to a principal component factor analysis. The results are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

Three clear performance factors were identified after five iterations using the varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization. These factors were named Size, Growth, and Social Responsibility based on the item correlations presented in Table 4. Quality of the attraction was the only item that was not strongly correlated with any of the three factors.

When the three factors are compared with the 10 performance rating scales from which they are derived, it becomes apparent that managers rate the three items making up the Social Responsibility factor most positively. Managers have a social responsibility to maintain a good relationship with their local community, ensure that their employees are satisfied, and maintain a high-quality attraction for patrons. It is clear that managers believe that the social responsibility element of attraction performance is generally better than growth or size. Results for the Growth and Size factors are somewhat mixed, but management perceptions of these performance factors are lower than for quality. A calculation of aggregate means for the three factors supports this interpretation (see Table 4). Social Responsibility received the lowest aggregate mean rating (1.78), followed by Growth (2.45) and Size (2.67).

To explore the relationship between perceived performance and planning, we subjected the three performance factors identified in Table 4 to a one-way analysis of variance. The analysis compared the four levels of planning according to the aggregate mean ratings for the three performance factors. The results are presented in Table 6.

Based on the *F*-value (7.698) and resultant probability level (.000), the factor scores for the Growth factor were found to be significantly different between the four planning levels. As Table 6 indicates, the aggregate mean rating was significantly lower for level 4 planners than for nonplanners (level 1). The results indicate that average ratings decrease as the planning level increases. This suggests that an increased level of planning is associated with a significantly higher perception of attraction growth performance.

There was no significant difference between the planning levels for the Size and Social Responsibility factors. This indicates that there is no statistical difference in the way

TABLE 7

ROTATED FACTOR CORRELATION MATRIX FOR BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES

Environmental Complexity Measure	Mean[a]	Correlation of Environmental Factors		
		Competition	Change	Confidence
The actions of competitors are difficult to predict	3.16	*0.768*	0.193	0.064
There is a lot of innovation from competitors	3.38	*0.705*	0.030	–0.070
Unforeseen threats occur regularly	3.34	*0.698*	0.175	0.104
It is impossible to anticipate when and where new competitors will emerge	3.10	*0.613*	0.145	0.211
The business environment seems to change frequently	2.92	0.198	*0.848*	–0.012
The attraction is frequently faced with changing customer preferences	3.04	0.030	*0.843*	–0.032
It is difficult to anticipate change	3.16	0.276	*0.528*	0.273
The business environment is complex	2.52	0.399	*0.401*	–0.071
The market for the attraction is declining	3.73	–0.011	0.044	*0.891*
The outlook over the next 12 months is poor	3.86	0.146	–0.015	*0.872*
Aggregate factor mean[a]		3.23	2.83	3.80

Note: Italics indicate a strong correlation with the factors identified.
a. Mean is based on the following scale: 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*.

attractions at various levels perceive their performance in terms of size or social responsibility.

Environmental Complexity

The complexity of the environment in which tourist attractions operate can have a strong influence on the performance and management practices adopted by operators. Research in large firms indicates that when there is uncertainty about the environment, managers tend to increase the sophistication of their planning efforts (Lindsay and Rue 1980). Matthews and Scott (1995) found that small firms do not react to uncertainty in the same way as large organizations because they are constrained by their resources and their range of responses. Consequently, the sophistication of strategic and operational planing in small firms declined in response to increasing environmental uncertainty. In contrast, Shrader, Mulford, and Blackburn (1989) found that as competition dealing with customers became more uncertain, small firms adopted more strategic plans.

Attraction managers were asked to rate the complexity of the business environment by responding to a set of ten 5-point rating scales. The items, presented in Table 7, were tested for their reliability by using Cronbach's alpha model to test for similarity. An alpha of .74 was obtained, indicating a moderate to high similarity in the content being measured.

Environmental change emerges as a theme among the statements that received greater agreement from managers. Changes in the business environment, new competitors, and customer preferences all appear to contribute to environmental uncertainty. In contrast, negative statements that deal with the market outlook for attractions were less likely to receive agreement. There was greater disagreement with the statements "The outlook over the next 12 months is poor" and "The market for the attraction is declining." These two measures need to be placed in context, given that the survey was conducted prior to and during the introduction of Australia's Goods and Services Tax (GST) and a few months before the Sydney Olympic Games. Some attractions indicated that they had a negative outlook for the next 12 months as a result of the GST, while others noted that the Sydney Olympics created a positive outlook. Overall, however, these measures suggest that attractions are reasonably confident about their short-term future.

To simplify the data and identify underlying patterns, we subjected the 10 rating scales to a principal component factor analysis. The results are summarized in Tables 7 and 8.

Three clear environmental factors were identified after five iterations using the varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization. These factors were named Competition, Change, and Confidence based on the item correlations presented in Table 7. The only environmental complexity statement that was not clearly correlated with any of the three factors was "The business environment is complex."

A calculation of aggregate means for the three factors produced mixed results (see Table 7). Perhaps the clearest pattern is that attraction managers are confident about the environmental outlook for attractions. Managers generally indicated disagreement with the two negative statements that make up the environmental confidence factor (i.e., "The market for the attraction is declining" and "The outlook over the next 12 months is poor"). Environmental Confidence received the highest aggregate mean rating (3.80), followed by Competition (3.23) and Change (2.83).

To explore the relationship between environmental complexity and planning, we subjected the three environmental factors identified in Table 7 to a one-way analysis of variance. The analysis compared the four levels of planning according to the aggregate mean ratings for the three environmental factors. The results are presented in Table 9.

TABLE 8

FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES

	Initial Eigenvalues			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
Factor	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.095	30.947	30.947	3.247	23.466	23.466
2	1.622	16.216	47.163	1.959	19.594	42.060
3	1.188	11.883	59.046	1.699	16.987	59.046

TABLE 9

ONE-WAY ANOVA RESULTS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLEXITY FACTORS AND PLANNING LEVEL

	Planning Level									
	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4			
Performance Factor	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	Mean	*n*	*F*	*p*
Competition	3.20	66	3.24	73	3.23	41	3.24	157	0.056	0.983
Change	2.89	67	2.94	74	2.77	41	2.77	153	1.316	0.269
Confidence	3.60	74	3.70	82	3.93	43	3.90	167	3.001	0.031

Note: Mean is based on the following scale: 1 = *strongly agree* to 5 = *strongly disagree*.

Based on the *F*-value (3.001) and resultant probability level (.031), the aggregate mean ratings for Confidence were found to be significantly different between the four levels of planning. As Table 9 indicates, the mean ratings for level 3 and level 4 planners were notably higher than the mean ratings for level 1 and level 2 planners.

The findings suggest that managers at level 1 and level 2 are less confident and more negative about the future outlook for their attraction. There were no significant differences between the planning levels for the Competition and Change factors.

Relationship between Planners and Nonplanners

An analysis of the relationship between attraction characteristics (planning context) and the level of planning provides fresh insights of the consequences of planning on tourist attractions. The findings support the general notion that larger attractions are more likely to engage in planning. In summary, higher levels of planning are associated with the following:

- Higher visitor numbers
- More gross revenue
- Larger asset value
- Greater total profit
- Higher admission prices
- Longer length of stay
- Greater number of open days
- Better perceptions of growth
- Greater environmental confidence
- Lower levels of management tenure

There do not appear to be any differences among tourist attractions that plan or do not plan in terms of self-report measures of environmental complexity, such as competition and change, or for measures of performance, such as size and social responsibility. Generally, the results indicate that attractions engaging in planning activities have more desirable traits than attractions that do not plan. Specifically, short-term planning alone appears to lead to more desirable traits, while long-term planning is related to additional positive performance characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

The research reported in this article provides a broad review of the link between Australian tourist attraction characteristics and the level of planning in those attractions. It has unearthed a pattern of findings that suggests that the attractions with the highest levels of planning tend to have higher levels of perceived performance and to be more profitable organizations, with a sounder asset base looking to the future with better growth prospects and confidence. It would seem from these findings that there should be an impetus for all tourist attractions to participate in more planning endeavors, although this presumes that the skill levels and resources of those managers who are currently not involved in planning are adequate for these managerial demands. As Bail (1980, p. 112) reports in his analysis of museums and small heritage attractions, there are prevailing amateurism and low levels of capitalization in some of the attractions studied:

> Small out-of-the-way museums often contain a wealth of bits and pieces, bric-à-brac, well worth the detour. An amateur has happened upon some object, or the broad subject, and before long his nose develops into a classifying mania. . . . And sheds are tacked onto garages; annexes onto houses; disused ware-

houses, odeons and empty churches are seized and converted.

The very small kind of attraction characterized by these comments may be contrasted with the larger Australian theme parks, where there are management teams dealing with the future scenarios of highly commercial business operations. These contrasts represent an important final commentary on this study. It is hoped that the study of attractions is stimulated by this broad overview from one continent. Nevertheless, both within this sample and studies of attractions in other countries, states, or regions, there is much to be done to test out the findings reported in the present context. It may be useful to view the findings of this work as implicit hypotheses to examine in more densely populated regions or in locations where there are world leaders in attraction management and innovation. In those circumstances, the modeling of managerial behavior and extensive planning levels might produce additional insights into the nature of tourist attraction management. For researchers keen to pursue longitudinal and historical studies in tourism, there are also possibilities to explore the way attractions have planned their futures since their inception.

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